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**Introduction**

Do most people want to be successful or significant? I think so. Of course there are those who don’t want anything to do with success or significance and others want to clarify the meaning of these concepts before committing their point of view. If you are unsure about your position, you could reference a wealth of relevant information on the Web or in libraries (do remember going to library?). However, the problem you will experience is filtering and distilling the plethora of information that’s on offer into a truth that works for you. I am therefore going to assume you want to be successful or significant and do not want to go on an ontological journey to discover meaning.

It would also seem that to become successful or significant one needs a unique and sustainable competitive advantage. Some, like Olympic sprinter Usain Bolt, inherited a competitive advantage in the form of physical superiority, which helps them outperform the opposition. Others inherit money or possessions and use these as their competitive advantage to gain success. But most of us can’t rely on an inheritance - physical or otherwise, we have to manufacture a competitive advantage to herald success or significance.
Chapter one – Fire and Ice

*Can you develop a unique and sustainable competitive advantage?*

My research indicated that *mental toughness* can provide you with a unique and sustainable competitive advantage. This is complemented by the fact that neuropsychologists agree we are instinctively competitive. They claim we contend with others by nature and that being instinctively competitive is one of our survival mechanisms. However, this instinct alone doesn’t give us a unique and sustainable benefit in this modern era. I propose that my *mental toughness* model exposes you to an approach that will give you; an upper hand on its own, it will combine with instinctive competitiveness and work in harmony with another competitive advantage that you already possess and enhance it even further.

*Use the Matthew effect to access higher levels of performance*

The model that emerged from my research on *mental toughness* consists of seven components. These can be applied selectively or cumulatively as a holistic programme to empower you to manage, and then master, your mind. When the *mental toughness* model is applied holistically you will probably reap an additional benefit known as the Matthew effect. The Matthew effect is a concept gleaned from the Book of Matthew 25:29 in the Christian Bible. “For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away”

This biblical claim was popularized by Professor Anders Eriksson of Florida State university and then referenced in Malcolm Gladwell’s book; *Outliers: The Story of Success* (2008) Gladwell correlates age-related success in contact sports like rugby and ice hockey with the Matthew Effect. He claims research reveals that many boys who have birthdates in the early part of the school calendar year initially benefit from a size advantage. This size advantage results in their initial selection into the A teams in their schools. This results in being exposed to better
coaches and the cumulative effect continues until they are better represented in age-related top teams.

In a *mental toughness* context the Matthew Effect can be experienced because you can use the components of the *mental toughness* model to gain a cumulative advantage. In doing so, each component of the model builds on to the previous one and gives you incremental gains. It can be likened to using scaffolding on a building. You access greater heights as you build on the previous level. Benefits are derived from the individual components, as well as additional gains from the synergy, due to accumulation.

This concept applies in most situations. You simply have to get the first scaffold in place; or identify one that is already in place. For the majority, there will be a skill, an attitude, a physical advantage, an educational advantage, a family member, a friend or an alliance to scaffold onto. There is an identifiable starting point for most of us. It’s worth noting that success or significance is not the exclusive domain of people from privileged circumstances. There are many examples of people from disadvantaged backgrounds that achieve both success and significance. However, I acknowledge that people who are extremely disadvantaged or clinically depressed will struggle to muster the enthusiasm to find an aspect to scaffold onto.

*Mental toughness is not the magic bullet for all situations*

Note, that whilst *mental toughness* can create enhanced competitiveness and help apparently healthy people with some chronic problems, it is not a panacea for mental illness nor is it the snake oil remedy for all performance needs. In addition, *mental toughness* is not the only determinant of performance and therefore success or even
significance. Excellent performance, in any endeavour, may be the outcome of major interventions or it may be nuanced. It’s usually the result of a convergence of many factors including talent or luck, often referred to as randomness. There do not seem to be any simple, one-size-fits-all solutions for how we should lead our lives, improve our performances or address chronic problems. Performance is a complex subject and needs to be viewed in a systemic way. But, despite this complexity it’s generally accepted that mental toughness is one of the most important factors in gaining a competitive advantage or helping you address chronic problems. I therefore suggest that you absorb from this book what is useful for you, discard what you find useless and add what you know already (That suggestion is paraphrased from the Bruce Lee philosophy; Jeet Kune Do).

Can you develop mental toughness literacy?
Assuming mental toughness is an area that will help you improve your performance; I am proposing a range of components that you could use to develop your mental toughness literacy, help you move in the direction of your dreams and (when necessary) punch above your weight. In many instances you will find that you know something or even a great deal about the components I am suggesting. However, despite this knowledge, you may not be doing enough with it. That is why I call my programme Mental Toughness – Mastering your Mind, because it’s not enough that you know it – you need to convince your mind that you must do it as well.

Some people are born with, or have developed; significant physical or technical abilities that help them outperform their opposition. It’s my claim that these abilities are enhanced when supported with mental toughness. Mental toughness itself can be predisposed, as one can see in the tendency for some very young children to be willing to delay gratification and show discipline for later reward. The less people are gifted with a predisposition, the more they will need to develop mental toughness literacy.
Not 50% physical and 50% mental but 100% physical and 100% mental

So, just how much of success can be attributed to mental toughness and how much is physical or technical? Dr Ross Tucker in his blog; the Science of Sport writes that the debate on the relative contributions of the mental and the physical to success in sport rages on. There is no agreement on how much each grants you. He writes; “some got philosophical and said it was not 50% mental and 50% physical but rather ‘100% mental, 100% physical’ but it depends on the sport. Golf is different to athletics; long jump differs from high jump, both of which vary from the marathon. Downhill skiing no doubt requires substantial parts of each, and also requires different skills within them. Mental or physiological: Difficult to pin down”.

Playing a good inner game helps you to play a good outer game

To play a consistently good outer game requires a good inner game. The inner game is played in the mind. Let’s take the demands of performing well at golf as an example. Playing the outer game requires knowledge of the sport as well as its mechanical skills. To improve the outer game you need to increase your game know-how and develop mechanical skills through learning and experience. Your inner game exists beyond the knowledge and logistics of the game. Understanding this intrinsic resource and developing it, has a huge influence on performance. The great golfers understand that the outer game can only take them so far; to get further they need to improve their inner game because it’s ultimately this understanding that will enable them, and you, to beat the curve, which I elaborate on below.
Beat the performance curve before regressing to the mean

The bell curve is a useful model to represent the relationship between performance and time. The line of the Bell curve starts at the mean which is at point A. As we invest effort and allocate resources, the curve steadily increases over time. But eventually, other forces exceed the influence of our effort and resources. The curve reaches a maximum point and starts a downward journey. The concept of beating the curve means that you adapt, introduce change (renewal, reinvention and innovation) while the line is still ascending and while there is upward and positive momentum. Initially, the self-enforced change will cause a loss in momentum and the performance line will plateau as you go through the learning and developmental process. This plateau sets us up for the next upward stage.

The problem, of course, is in the mind because our instincts, beliefs and mindsets tell us; *don't fix it if it's not broken*. This is where *mental toughness* is required. It’s the ability to sense the need for change and to make these changes before you have to i.e. at point B rather than point C. If you introduce change at this stage, you build on current success and can introduce longer term sustainability through launching a new Bell curve starting at point B. This new curve will probably cause a short-term loss in performance gain. Accepting this loss is another reason why you need to be mentally tough to beat the curve.

Most people are willing to introduce change on the downward slope of the curve at point C. The change is driven by the fear of loss and the need to survive. However, arresting the downward momentum before you regress to the mean, requires a lot more effort and far greater failure is incurred. At best, we bottom out at point D (back at the mean) before ascending.
Eighty percent of success is turning up

I am sure you remember the 2010 FIFA World Cup tournament staged in South Africa. Do you recall the catch line - *Feel it - it’s here?* Well I'm afraid you need to *face it - it’s gone*. However, did you go to a stadium or a fan park? If you were in Cape Town did you go on a fan walk? Congratulations to those who fully engaged with the tournament. It was truly a memorable experience. As actor Woody Allen said: *eighty percent of success is turning up.*

You will often hear the captains of losing teams’ claim that they performed poorly because their team did not ‘*turn up*’. Clearly they do not mean turning up physically, they presumably mean that they competed, but not to their full potential. Is this happening to you? Do you make an appearance only to fill a seat? Or do you extend your presence to creating additional value from the experience? For example, if your viewing of the FIFA World Cup went beyond a spectator mindset, you may have picked up some valuable insights into the role of *mental toughness* as a competitive advantage.

*Can you become a ‘world admiration winner’?*

An interesting outcome of the FIFA tournament hosted in South Africa - viewed through a different mindset - is that there were two winners. Spain was the World Cup winner and South Africa was the World Admiration winner. South Africa was World Admiration winner, not for the way it played football, but for the way the people of South Africa showed up as hosts of the tournament. You may remember the many prophets of doom who predicted that the tournament would not go ahead and, if it did, that it would be a dismal failure. There were even claims that visitors would be robbed or worse, killed. Yet despite these dire predictions, it did go ahead and became a huge success. In particular, it demonstrated enormous reserves of
spirit and a feel-good factor among South Africans. Tragically, since then, we have neither maintained these ideals nor built on the potential Matthew Effect that this event provided. Surely we don’t have to wait for another externally-driven event like a FIFA World Cup before we ‘turn up’ and demonstrate our spirit and unity. Of course the challenge for all of us is to get in touch with that enthusiasm at a personal level and apply it to aspects of our lives where it’s sorely needed. We need to do this because we have the ability, and shouldn’t wait until we are galvanised by hosting a World Cup event.

*The slimmest of margins determine success*

On the subject of world admiration, what was it that made the positive difference in success for Great Britain in the 2012 London Olympics? Why did they increase their medal tally from 47 in Beijing to 65 in London? Did they discover new and better athletes for this event? Sport scientists tell us that the average difference over the past thirty years between a Gold medal winner and the 4th place competitor is a minuscule 0.5%. That is the difference between success and anonymity. It ranges from: *well done you are the Gold medal winner; you are famous* and 0.5% away from this adulation at 4th place the question is; *who was that?*

Clearly the British Olympic effort addressed some of the 0.5% needed to radically improve their medal standing, but what did they do right? Did they achieve the change through a systematic effort across many things, including *mental toughness?* My observations and information help me conclude that the answer is a resounding yes.

In addition to doing well in the Olympics competition, the city of London also became a World Admiration winner for the way the Olympics and the Paralympics were hosted. To achieve World Admiration status I’m sure the
people of London also made a systematic effort across many areas rather than excelling in just one.

**Olympic Legacy - how long can it last?**

It’s also worth asking why British elite sport performance achieved higher levels immediately after the 2012 Olympics. They had many world class performances, notably those of Andy Murray, Chris Froome, the British Lions and the English cricket team in the England leg of the Ashes test. Did the euphoria of a successful Olympics performance provide the confidence that improved performance? How long can the Olympic legacy last as a motivating factor before it wears thin or the opposition find ways to counter the British bullishness?

Fortunately, for most of us, we are not competing for an Olympic Gold medal, nor are we staging an international event. For us to achieve success or significance we generally won’t have to navigate such small percentages. However, we will still have to make a systematic effort across many areas and fortunately we have a higher chance of being the most admired in our endeavours.

**Professor Avis’ four factors for mental toughness**

In a discussion with my PhD academic supervisor, sport psychologist and international tennis player; the late Professor Paul Avis, he claimed that there were four factors associated with developing *mental toughness*, namely: socialisation, nutrition, physical activity and anxiety.

But, before we discussed his list, Avis dealt with the concept of nature and nurture referring to Steven Pinker’s book; *The Blank Slate* (2002). In his book Pinker attests that much of what we do is in response to genetic predispositions.
Avis explained that this may apply to mental toughness as well. His argument was that our species has survived generations of hardship and that the ability to manage them is probably hardwired into our brains in the same way as many instincts, such as the well-known fight-or-flight response. He added with a wry smile; ‘fortunately, it’s not a differentiating factor as we all have good mental toughness genes; we would not be alive if this were not the case’.

Have you been raised to be mentally tough?

Avis added, if we all start with a genetic predisposition for being mentally tough the question is: what have we done about it? Has the way we have been socialised enabled us to live to our full genetic potential? Have we built onto this mentally tough base or have we eroded it? This led to Avis’ first factor: socialisation. Here he spoke about the extent to which we have had role models, mentors or experiences that gave us credible as well as inspiring reference points and mindsets on how to be mentally tough. He noted that these were past experiences we had endured, and subsequently mastered, that will empower us when we’re faced with future hardships, i.e. when the going gets tough. Boxing provides an example of a reference point. Simply put; for boxers, a punch on the nose hurts less than it would for the average person because they have grown accustomed to this kind of injury.

Do you eat for your mind as well as your body?

His second factor was nutrition. Avis explained that people should eat to nourish their brains as well as their bodies. He added that there are many research studies linking the importance of healthy nutrition to enhanced brain function. However, he also warned that much of the research claiming brain-related improvements based on eating certain foods or supplements, fell into the pseudo-science category. My recollection of this part of the discussion was Avis’ expansion on the issue of nutraceuticals and, in particular, an overwhelming consumption of supplements and vitamins. He called these “powders, pills and
potions” and referenced their benefits as mostly mythical. He felt that there was room for skepticism about substances that claim to improve brain function and that generally speaking, supplementation should be subject to closer scrutiny. His view was that most of us can get the energy and nourishment we need from balanced eating, i.e. significant portions of meat and dairy (or other protein and fat sources) plus vegetables, salads, fruits and nuts.

My view is that you will probably need to supplement if you have a medical condition or if you’re an elite athlete. In these instances see a registered dietician first. Have a thorough assessment and establish a nutritional needs baseline. This is a safer approach to randomly popping powders, pills and potions on anecdotal evidence and hearsay. Avis additionally expressed the concern that supplementation can result in a licensing effect, where the consumer feels justified in indulging in poor consumption because they have a so-called healthy supplementation regime. I recommend Ben Goldacre’s books Bad Science (2011) and Bad Pharma (2013). If you’re interested in reading about how the scientific process has been manipulated and distorted.

Professor Tim Noakes has also taken an interest in the science of nutrition and has challenged the nutritional claims associated with high cholesterol, obesity and heart disease. He advocates a primal diet that is low in carbohydrates for people who are prone to lifestyle disease or want to maintain a healthy weight. He asserts that our ability to manage energy intake with expenditure has been distorted because we’ve developed an addiction to carbohydrates. This part of Noakes’ claim stimulates my interest, as it has to do with the mind and I believe mental toughness can be applied to address this carbohydrate addiction.
Go for a run to clear your head

Avis’ third factor was physical conditioning - or what is commonly known as being fit. He referred to the old adage of a sound mind in a sound body. When expanding on this he made reference to research on the link between aerobic exercise and brain function. He specifically referred to the research reviewed in Neuromolecular Medicine 2008; 10(2):128-40. Epub 2008 Feb 20, suggesting that physical exercise can promote neurogenesis in the hippocampus – an area of the brain thought to be important in memory and learning. The article claims; “current evidence indicates that the role of exercise boosting cognitive function is head-and-shoulders above that of brain training, drugs, nutritional supplements and meditation”. Is the opponent inside your head more daunting than the one outside?

The fourth factor culled from this discussion was the role of anxiety. Avis explained that chronic levels of what he called, threat anxiety and the negative stress associated with this sustained condition, had debilitating effects on mental performance. He said we cope better with anxiety that we perceive as competitive rather than threatening. He added ‘if the opponent inside your head has become more daunting than the one outside, then you are struggling with chronic threat anxiety’.

Trust me I am a doctor

The conversation on mental toughness with Professor Avis concluded with him claiming; ‘Mental toughness is a language spoken by many but understood by few’. He said many people make outrageous and unsubstantiated claims about the subject. He added that, once I had successfully completed my PhD, I could claim to be an expert on mental toughness because my assertions would be grounded in academically acceptable research. He concluded with a smile that I could back my views by saying ‘Trust me, I’m a doctor’. Well, it
took four years for me to qualify and I still don’t feel like an expert. However, I have moved on from being a well-informed amateur to having a deep, yet emerging, understanding of the subject.

On the subject of doctors you may want to check out Simon Singh’s book; *Trick or Treatment* (2008) to read about the hazards associated with slavishly following a wide range of people dispensing advice or cures under the banner: *trust me I am a doctor.*

*The mind signals fatigue before the muscles*

Someone who’s an expert in exercise science and happens to be a medical doctor is UCT’s Professor Tim Noakes. I was inspired by a talk given by Noakes claiming that *the mind, not the muscles, governs fatigue.* He based the talk on research that indicated the brain as governor of fatigue, even though muscles were the final arbitrator.

The Internet site, UCT Open Content, comments on Noakes’ research as follows: ‘*In the past Professor Tim Noakes was convinced that physiology could explain performance. After 38 years of studying the human body, he now believes that the mind and the role of self-belief are crucial factors in human athletic feats’.*

My understanding is that the signal one receives from the brain telling us our muscles are fatigued, is misleading because it’s based on a mental estimation of reserves. I feel that this signal can be likened to those that one gets from a motor vehicle’s fuel gauge. A warning light comes on indicating that the fuel level is on reserve, but it’s *not* empty. In the same way, we receive a warning signal that we are tired and tend to interpret it as a sign that energy is depleted. Consequently, we may give up too early. I fully appreciate that your vehicle cannot, and you cannot, operate on nothing. However, in my experience I have
seen a fair amount of people create a competitive advantage by operating on reserve and some even seem to perform on vapours!

Before hearing about Noakes’ research on fatigue I had reviewed a wealth of academic and commercial literature on misleading mental signals and their roles in limiting aspects of performance. By extension, I believed that Noakes’ research could apply to these signals as well. Significantly, it occurred to me that many of us could experience better outcomes in our lives if we interpreted cerebral communication with greater accuracy. For example - if in negotiations, we maintained our bargaining position a little longer or, if in relationships, we maintained our composure a little longer, the outcomes might be more favourable than initially anticipated. We may also become more successful financially if we interpreted signals of fatigue with greater accuracy.

It seems that these signals often have their origins in acquired, but unconscious, beliefs. These beliefs appear to stem from our genes and our socialisation. Through our genetic material, we may inherit safety reserves that are hard-wired into our brains to keep us out of harm’s way. However, it seems that these reserves go beyond the call of duty; they also strongly regulate our ability to take risks and manage pressure.

Secondly, we seem to ‘inherit’ limiting beliefs from the environment in which we were socialised. We acquire a strong and pervasive sense of limitations set by cultural conservatism, social norms, taboos, as well as the expectations and behaviour of family, peers and mentors. These beliefs are then reinforced by our habitual behaviour, and that of the people around us, perpetuating a cycle in which these limitations are naturalised. In short, one of the ways to become mentally tough is to learn to become aware of these signals and, when necessary, to override them.
Aggression and intimidation applied in isolation can backfire. They are a bunch of sissies – hit them hard and they will lose their will to win. As an impressionable young rugby player in my early teens, these words are my first memory of anything vaguely approximating psychological strategy and by implication mental toughness in sport. Of course, these ‘motivational’ sentiments, expressed by a junior rugby coach, were just as easily turned on our team when we lost a game; ‘you bunch of sissies!’ My coach was probably trying to stimulate our ‘killer instinct’ by urging us to be more aggressive and, in this way, possibly develop a competitive advantage. I assume many people have had similar formative experiences, perpetuating the belief that a ‘killer instinct’ is the main mental component necessary for sporting success. However, my research shows that aggression and intimidation applied in isolation can backfire, inspiring the opposition to a winning performance. Not-with-standing aggression it remains a crucial component in collision sports like rugby where domination is a key success factor.

Beyond the sporting arena, in business, managers call upon employees to tap into their killer instincts to outdo and outmanoeuvre the opposition. Significantly, my research into the subject of mental toughness has demonstrated that such tactics, particularly applied in areas outside collision sports, are only effective if applied within a holistic and developmental context. If one reflects on the accomplishments of Gandhi, Mandela or Wangari Maathai, they all called upon mental skills that went well beyond the use of naked aggression.

*What is mental toughness?*

I would argue that mental toughness is best defined as the ability to manage your mind so that it directs your energy to the right place, at the right time and for the
right reason - now you can give your best performance consistently, regardless of what is going on within and around you.

During one of my stints as part of the management team of the Springboks, the defence coach, Les Kiss, summed up his defence philosophy as being able to deal with anything that confronts you. I believe this philosophy is applicable to *mental toughness*. Whatever your role, whether you are a manager, worker, sportsperson, coach, teacher, student, spouse, parent or child, you need the mental ability to deal with anything that confronts you, regardless. *Mental toughness* is thus an asset on the sports field and in any other form of human endeavour as well.

*If you can develop physical muscle you can develop mental muscle*

A useful analogy for developing *mental toughness* is that of a fitness regime. In a fitness regime your aim is to develop physical muscle and become physically fitter. In a *mental toughness* regime your aim is to develop mental muscle and become mentally tougher. You may want to consider the process of developing *mental toughness* as a fitness regime for your mind. In fact, mental and physical fitness may be closer than a mere analogy; they may actually overlap.

From my own experience, I have seen how building physical strength is a building block for enhanced mental strength. In other words if you fix your outside, it can go a long way towards fixing your inside. Of course, the converse is also true; if you develop your mental strength, it will in all likelihood encourage you to build physical strength as well. Thus the two regimes can be complementary. Many of you will know from past fitness training regimes, that you lost fitness when you stopped training. Well, I'm afraid the same is true of your mental conditioning programme; when you stop practising for *mental toughness* you lose mental muscle as well. Thinking about *mental toughness* in
the same way as physical fitness, provides a helpful framework for getting started.

*What is the trick or secret for mental toughness?*

The trick or secret to improving *mental toughness* is firstly to realise there is neither trick nor secret. My opinion is that quick fix or over simplified solutions to developing *mental toughness* or achieving success for that matter *insults our intelligence*. *Neither mental toughness nor success is contained in a quick-fix secret.*

My PhD research study attempted to offer an explanation for the concern I had about the effect of race based quotas on the *mental toughness* of Springbok rugby players. The outcome is contained in a model of *mental toughness* made up of seven complex and interactive components. They are: 1. Concentration, 2. Composure, 3. Controlled Aggression, 4. Confidence, 5. Calculated Risks, 6. Competence and 7. Commitment. Note that these components represent the conclusion of my research. This model is therefore one way, out of many other ways, to address the subject of *mental toughness*. I am therefore suggesting, at this point, that these seven components are the underlying architecture for developing your *mental toughness* competitive advantage.

At this stage I also want to distance myself from the pop psychology approach of promoting *mental toughness* as willpower. My research indicates that willpower is a factor, but is only part of the explanation and is not an explanation in its entirety.

The aforementioned *mental toughness* components have a sequential logic. When embarking on developing your *mental toughness* competitive advantage, you will be best served if you start with number 1 and work your way through to number 7.
The recommended approach is to embrace all 7 components of mental toughness - aiming to do each one better by embracing the complexity of each one. This approach eliminates many mistakes, and possible ridicule, because of inappropriate or zealous application of the more obvious components of mental toughness. Benefits then grow synergistically; they start to feed off each other and grow exponentially. One of my conclusions was that mentally tough people make difficult things seem easy for themselves, and they make easy things seem difficult for their competitors. By reducing mental toughness to a model with 7 components, I've made it seem easy for me and for you. Your challenge is to work towards mastering mental toughness by digging down into the complexity of managing your mind to discover and learn the skills and behaviours needed for each component. In doing so, you can then make it difficult for your competitors.

The journey towards becoming mentally tougher can become one of your goals. I say journey, because mental toughness is a journey and not a destination. Mental toughness must also not be viewed as a problem that needs a solution because by the time you have found a solution the nature of the problem has, in all likelihood, changed.

Know your mind, know your body

It’s common knowledge that your mind and body form one interlinked system, and that your body responds to instructions from your mind and vice versa. Think about how your mind responds to feeling sick: daily tasks become difficult to accomplish and general motivation to execute these tasks decreases significantly. Conversely, when you feel anxious or sad, your body’s ability to perform even the most automatic of tasks becomes difficult - your breath is shorter, your heart beats faster, a feedback loop between your body and mind exists and influences your daily life in a balancing act of give and take.
It is this balance between mind and body that is so often overlooked in life. As humans we have an ingrained preference for physical or mental tasks before choosing to excel in that specific arena. Note the operative word "choose" because in the end, it is a choice. We have the ability to strive for supremacy in both, but this journey to physical and mental excellence is based on choices and hinges heavily on your motivation.

_Born this way_

Some say no matter how hard you practice and strive for that "excellence", you can never achieve the same levels of mental or physical prowess that leaders, elite athletes and achievers are 'born' with. However, my research shows that these claims are simply not true. Yes, some people certainly seem to have a greater natural inclination towards leadership or mental toughness. However, everyone can acquire some of the skills, which enables them to improve their performances and excel within the realms of their own boundaries. Essentially, you can learn to be the best version of you.

_Playing a good game_

In today's world, mental, rather than bodily attributes allow you to get ahead. Gone are the days of providing for oneself or family via physical means - although it is important to note that whilst there are laborious jobs out there, very few of these involve cavemen duties such as hunting or gathering. Essentially, we need to be mentally tough, resilient to today’s fast-paced and stress-inducing world.

The ideal approach to developing mental toughness is all-encompassing, what is termed the holistic approach. By concentrating on only one part, like aggression, you're unlikely to gain a sustainable competitive advantage. The key is to learn to tell yourself to "do" something! How often do you hear of an elderly man or woman on their death bed say "I wish I did this or that"? Clearly they had the motivation, but simply did not follow through - somewhere along the line they
decided their dreams were untimely or too difficult to achieve. These mental boundaries acted as an effective obstacle to their goals. There's a large gap between saying you'll do something and actually doing it. Ultimately, for a competitive advantage to exist there needs to be alignment between saying and doing.

*Can mental toughness improve team performance?*

If *mental toughness* can improve individual performance, and it seems it can, will it do the same for team performance? What would the accumulated benefit be if the individuals in an entire team developed their *mental toughness*? Use a rugby team as an example. What would the improvement be if each member of the team embarked on boosting their *mental toughness* around five percent over a defined, strategic period? Clearly, there is a potential cumulative progression of 75%. This is without the exponential benefits of synergy and spirit development derived from team members becoming aware of their advancement.

*The negative side of a mental toughness programme - Camp Staaldraad*

Improvement in performance is dependent on many factors; one of these is the willingness of the team leaders to acknowledge *mental toughness* as a factor of boosted performance. My experience has taught me that several sport coaches and business managers recognize the need to develop *mental toughness* in their team members, yet most want a quick-fix solution with immediate, miracle benefits. Coaches tend to overrate their own abilities to implement *mental toughness* interventions and can be irrational about the choice of professionals they select to help them.
The *Camp Staaldraad* intervention for the 2003 Springbok rugby team was a result of an irrational choice of a professional to implement a *mental toughness* programme. It was implemented as a part of the team’s preparation for the Rugby World Cup. Obviously, this intervention was intended to develop *mental toughness*; however, it failed dismally for many reasons. For instance, the content was imported from a pre-democratic South African police context which meant that it disregarded the Springbok team’s diversity and cultural dynamic. In addition, the implementation took a quick-fix approach which totally ignored the fundamentals of the process, and the content did not adhere to psychologically acceptable principles nor did it conform to generally acceptable ethics and values.

Tragically, the *Camp Staaldraad* intervention created negative publicity that undervalued *mental toughness* development programmes in sport and business. When introducing *mental toughness* development, the challenge is to ensure that sport leaders or business executives understand that such progression needs to be specific to context and that it should be process driven. Simply using a once-off, generic team-building or psychological skills programme to develop *mental toughness* could be compared with using an athletics training regime of running up mountains to improve an athlete’s speed. This may obliquely improve the athlete’s pace, but it’s not specific to the needs of agility development. Programmes need to be specific and geared to the individual and the context.

*Is mental toughness enough without other abilities?*

Words of caution, the benefits of *mental toughness* are seldom accrued in isolation of other competencies. Part of the process of developing *mental toughness* involves assessing your overall competency needs, and advancing holistically. Once you have these competencies, your confidence rises and the potential for *mental toughness* benefits is enhanced.
As an example, I recall a junior tug-of-war team from my son’s schooldays. The team was extremely motivated to do well at an inter-house tournament. However, the opposition teams were bigger and stronger. This made it difficult for the participants to conjure the sufficient amount of mental toughness in the form of determination or spirit against the physical odds they faced. Of course, if you have tried Tug-of-war, you will know that winning isn’t always about size and strength; it also requires an enormous amount of mental strength as well. But, in the absence of physical girth, you are unlikely to dominate on mental strength alone. You need the entire range of skills. Despite being highly motivated and initially determined, they lost because they simply lacked the basic Tug-of-war physical success factors.

The fire and ice metaphor

Mental toughness can be represented by a metaphor that I have come to believe is central to understanding it: fire and ice. For me, it’s crucial for an understanding of mental toughness to embrace the seemingly paradoxical relationship between fire and ice. People who are mentally resilient have fire in the belly and ice in the brain. They combine a gut-felt enthusiasm, passion and drive to achieve with a mind that is clear and calm. The fire component is associated with qualities of heat, power and assertiveness; on the other hand, the ice component is associated with the qualities of cold, patience and persistence. These two seemingly opposite truths are bound together into a new truth - a set of conditions where intensity and tranquillity come together to enable success. However, while fire and ice can thus be mutually reinforcing, they can also short-circuit each other if they aren’t held in balance: fire melts the ice, which in turn douses the flames. In relation to the fire and ice metaphor, desire is a fire component.
The role of desire in success

The Greek philosopher Aristotle claimed that desire is the starting point for all achievement. Simple, perhaps, but profound: it is obvious that you are unlikely to achieve something if you don’t think the process needed for a desirable result is worth the effort. Many people are driven by an outcome like winning a gold medal or making a million, but they let go of their dreams when the work and sacrifice required to achieve this becomes their reality.

Desire awakens us from inertia and sets us on the path to a tangible result; it instills in us a competitive edge, the ‘will to win’. A lack of ambition may be the most significant obstacle in achieving any objective, including developing mental toughness.

When the pressure is on, when the going gets tough, you will need reserves of this need to enable you to make sacrifices, be patient and keep trying. Without the necessary desire to succeed you simply won’t manage the high workload associated with success or overcome the inevitable obstacles on the journey. It’s not uncommon to come across people who, instead of conquering their hurdles would rather have circular arguments about success and debate its meaning.

But what if our desire is manipulated?

There are many who interpret desire as a feeling that can be manipulated by the dark forces of conspirators, unethical marketers and an unscrupulous media. To some extent they are right. However, if you allow the fire of ambition to be doused by the fears of manipulation, you are allowing a small part to dominate the whole. Concerns about exploitation are valid and should always be held in awareness, but only as a cautionary mechanism.
To address concern about being manipulated it’s prudent to indulge in some critical and deep reflection. Consider how your desire may be influenced by your views regarding success or significance. If you struggle with the notion of pursuing personal accomplishment, it may be due to deeply rooted convictions about people who have gained undeserved prosperity. Could your current belief system be dominated by memes about the so-called filthy rich? Could you have created associations of guilt or rejection around being successful? If these feelings are significant in you, you may be aborting your journey to achievement.

A client on my Mastering your Mind e-learning programme wrote: I believed that 85% of successful people are self-centred, selfish people who do not care about other people at all. I also believe that most of them do not have a private life. I think these beliefs have been limiting me in pursuing success or significance as I feel that it would turn me into someone I do not really want to be. I feel that this belief limited me so much that I failed to see the bigger picture and just accepted mediocrity.

*Use your instinctive desires to develop motivation*

I could conjure up a fairly substantial list of instinctive desires, but the following will do to make the point. When you are hungry you will intuitively desire food. When lonely you develop a need for company. Sexual attraction also generates significant desire. It’s not important to unpack the psycho dynamics of these cravings but it is vital for you to realise that they are instinctive and plentiful. The problem is not a lack of yearning. We have latent desires; it’s a matter of getting in touch with it in order to transmute it into useful motivation.

Instincts are not your only source of desire. There are also many instances where you have generated the want because you were inspired. You may recall experiencing and expressing passionate inclination after reading a book or magazine article, watching a movie or attending an event.
How does passion drive success?

I have often facilitated groups where, as a part of their learning process, they reflect on and identify their list of most significant values. Invariably, passion comes up on this list. In this instance I define passion as the intense emotion you get in touch with and use to compel yourself towards a vision or goal. In particular, ardency is an emotion you can use in the absence of resources that are normally needed for achievement.

The human polar bear has passion

Lewis Pugh is an example of someone, who sought success through enduring extreme cold water conditions and now displays passion for environmental sustainability. In my opinion Lewis drew upon mental toughness to develop his unique competitive advantage. I met Lewis as a schoolboy who decided to join the Clifton Surf Lifesaving Club in Cape Town where I was captain at the time. Extremely driven and hungry for personal accomplishment, Lewis trained hard and showed extraordinary willingness to go the extra mile. However, no amount of training was going to be enough to make Lewis a serious contender for top honours in competitive surf lifesaving. Top swimming competitors were usually of Olympic standard. This did not seem to deter Lewis who trained more than most, as well as helping to teach others.

It quickly became apparent that Lewis was willing and able to spend more time in the bitterly cold Atlantic Ocean than any of his peers. I suspect it was this discovery that enabled him to differentiate between himself and others on this count. He developed and fostered the unique ability to endure icy water conditions. Eventually this led to international fame as an environmentalist and earned him the nickname ‘human polar bear’.
**Critical self-reflection**

Critical self-reflection is one of the competencies needed to develop mental toughness. Whilst chapter seven is dedicated to mental toughness competencies, I need to bring this competency to your attention from the start as I would like you to critically self-reflect on your learning experience as you read. You will therefore get a set of questions after each chapter.

Broadly speaking, and in this context, critical reflection is the process of questioning, analysing, testing and reconstructing your mindsets, assumptions and perspectives about the role that mental toughness plays in your success or significance. In most chapters I refer to books that you may want to read to complement your learning. The extra reading also helps you to gain a deep understanding of the subject. A set of questions will be provided with each chapter to guide your critical reflection.

For this chapter I would like you to address the following questions: The ability to be successful, significant or to address chronic problems is strongly influenced by our beliefs about these subjects.

1. Identify the underlying beliefs that you have about success or significance and critically reflect on how they are affecting your pursuit of these goals.
2. Desire and passion are the starting points of most journeys. Think about your levels of desire and passion for success or significance and critically reflect on how you could increase these feelings.
3. To become successful or significant is dependent on a variety of factors including randomness. One of the things you can do to influence your chances is to develop competitive advantages. This book proposes that mental toughness can give you an additional and unique competitive advantage. Identify and critically reflect on what you feel are your current competitive advantages that you can use to enhance your scaffolding process.
4. *Beating the curve* means adapting, introducing changes, innovating and improvising, before you peak or land in a disadvantageous position or downward spiral. Reflect on and identify what adaptations or changes you need to make right now so that beating the curve can apply to you.

5. Healthy eating and overall fitness are two of the crucial underpinning factors for developing *mental toughness*. Reflect on and identify how the *eating and exercise regimes* that you currently follow meet the requirement for developing *mental toughness*? If they don't, what are your plans to address this?